

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION. OFFICE OF COMMUNITY RELATIONS [1181]

OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPHS: THISTLE DISASTER DOCUMENTATION, 1983-1984.

3 cu. ft.

DESCRIPTION: Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) Community Relations personnel documented the Thistle Disaster of 1983-1984. Thistle, originally the name of a town, became a term used to describe a massive mud slide which created a natural dam across the Spanish Fork River and destroyed the town of Thistle. UDOT Photographic Services Director, Gerald E. Peterson, took hundreds of photographs of the Thistle area from April 1983 to May 1984. This collection not only documents the disaster and subsequent reconstruction, but also includes photographs of Thistle before the disaster.

Documentation of the disaster began in April 1983 after heavy precipitation caused instability in the earth. UDOT crews initially responded to reports that shifting earth had left huge cracks in U.S. Highway 6. Shortly the giant slide, moving at 6-18 inches an hour, dumped more than one million cubic yards of earth over the highway and destroyed the Denver and Rio Grande Western railroad tracks. Highway crews were unable to save either the road or the tracks as the mud mountain continued to slide from early April into May. The massive slide created a natural dam across the Spanish Fork River, and the dam in turn created Thistle Lake which completely submerged and destroyed the town of Thistle. The U.S. Corp of Engineers, the Utah National Guard and construction workers from many companies joined UDOT workers in response to the Thistle slide. Both Governor Scott Matheson and President Ronald Reagan declared the slide a disaster area. Efforts to control the slide turned to reconstruction of rail and roadways, and to the construction of a drainage tunnel which would control drainage of Thistle Lake. Throughout the reclamation and reconstruction process workers were concerned about the questionable stability of the natural dam, with subsequent slides, and the general instability of the earth in the area.

ARRANGEMENT: Photographs documenting the Thistle disaster are roughly chronological by date from April 1983 to May 1984, with pre-disaster photographs inserted in May 1983.

RELATED RECORDS: Most of the Thistle photographs are duplicated in OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPHS, series 24289. OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPHS also contain negatives of these photographs, many enlargements and slides, as well as additional Thistle documentation photographs not included in this series. OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPHS INDEX, series 25122, provides information about this series as outlined in the container list.

CUSTODY HISTORY: Thistle documentation photographs were transferred from UDOT to Utah State Archives in 2003.

PROCESSING NOTE: This series was processed by Rosemary Cundiff in November and December 2003.

PREFERRED CITATION: Cite the Utah State Archives and Records Service, the creating agency name, the series title, and the series number.

CONTAINER LIST

Box	Folder	Description
1	1	Thistle slide related business cards and miscellaneous documents
1	2-3	83-034, dam and lake in Spanish Fork Canyon - 18 Apr 1983
1	4-6	83-035, dam and lake in Spanish Fork Canyon - 19 Apr 1983
1	7-9	83-037, Spanish Fork mud slide - 21 Apr 1983
1	10	83-040, night shots Spanish Fork, Thistle Junction - 23 Apr 1983
1	11	83-042, aerials mud slide and lake at Thistle Junction - 18 Apr 1983
1	12	83-044, aerials mud slide and lake at Thistle Junction - 19 Apr 1983
1	13	83-047, mud slide in Spanish Fork Canyon - 27 Apr 1983
1	14	83-052, Spanish Fork mud slide (drilling) - 1 May 1983
1	15	83-053, aerials Spanish Fork mud slide - 28 Apr 1983
1	16-20	83-056, Spanish Fork mud slide, Billies Mountain - 4 May 1983
1	21	83-057, aerials Spanish Fork mud slide - 5 May

Box	Folder	Description
		1983
1	22-25	83-058, Spanish Fork mud slide RR tunnel construction - 8 May 1983
1	26-27	83-059, Spanish Fork mud slide RR tunnel construction - 9 May 1983
1	28-31	83-062, Spanish Fork mud slide Thistle Junction - 12 May 1983
1	32-34	83-063, Spanish Fork mud slide Thistle Junction - 13 May 1983
1	35-36	83-064, Spanish Fork mud slide 3 pumps to be cut - 15-16 May 1983
1	37	83-070, aerials Spanish Fork Dam & Thistle Lake - 17 May 1983
1	38	83-073, overflow tunnel at Spanish Fork Dam - 18 May 1983
1	39-41	83-074, Spanish Fork & Thistle water going through pipes - 18 May 1983
1	42	83-076, Spanish Fork Dam runoff has begun - 24 May 1983
1	43	83-077, George Anderson's photo Thistle Jct. in 1900 - 25 May 1983
1	44	83-078, Vern Jeffers' photo Springville on 9 Apr 1983 - 25 May 1983
1	45	83-084, Rio Grande RR House Thistle courtesy G. Anderson - 12 Jun 1983
1	46	83-085, old school at Thistle courtesy Rell Francis - 6 Jun 1983 old school at Thistle in 1985 -21 Jun 1985
1	47	old school at Thistle in 1985 -21 Jun 1985
1	48-49	83-089, Jeffers' photos of old Thistle - 20 Jun 1983
1	50	83-087, explosions old covered bridge - 15 Jun 1983
1	51	83-083, Utah Co. sheriff's office slides 15 Apr 1983 - 12 Jun 1983
1	52	83-082, Thistle ground shots 16 Apr 1983 - 28 May 1983
1	53	83-086, Thistle shots 14 Apr 1983 courtesy Mike Kenyon - 15 Jun 1983
1	54	83-193, Billies Mountain, Thistle photo 1958 - copied 1983
1	55	83-194, Gerald Peterson in Spanish Fork Canyon 1960 - copied 1983
1	56	83-082, Thistle ground shots 16 Apr 1983 - 28 May 1983
1	57	83-094, Bob Pace's home going under water - 10 Aug 1983
1	58	83-100, Spanish Fork Canyon water at 5192 mark - 25 May 1983
1	59-60	83-101, aerials Spanish Fork Canyon/Thistle - 26

Box	Folder	Description
		May 1983
1	61	83-109, erosion on dam - 28 May 1983
1	62-63	83-110, Spanish Fork dam water above 5200 mark - 29 May 1983
1	64	83-119, Spanish Fork canyon blasting - 31 May 1983
1	65-68	83-121, Spanish Fork dam and slide - 1 Jun 1983
1	69	83-122, Spanish Fork Dam and Thistle Lake - 2 Jun
1	70-71	83-125, aerials Spanish Fork Dam and Thistle Lake - 3 Jun 1983
1	72-73	83-131, new highway construction at Spanish Fork Canyon - 9 Jun 1983
2	1-3	83-136 mud slide on new railroad Spanish Fork Canyon - 15 Jun 1983
2	4-8	83-139, new Spanish Fork slide area - 18 Jun 1983
2	9	83-143, general shots around flood Thistle Dam - 21 Jun 1983
2	10	83-146, RR tracks damage from Richfield to Thistle - 24 Jun 1983
2	11	83-147, RR tunnel and track east of Thistle Tunnel - 6 Jul 1983
2	12-16	83-148, Thistle Lake and Dam railroad tracks and tunnel - 5 Jul 1983
2	17	83-163, Spanish Fork mud slide and Thistle Lake - 3 Aug 1983
2	18-24	83-165, S.F. flood victims, boats, fish ladders, trains - 10 Aug 1983
2	25	83-168, Stewart Canyon Road, Lake Thistle and damaged U.S. 89 South - 13 Aug 1983
2	26-27	83-171, Thistle Lake aerials - 25 Aug 1983
2	28-29	83-172, Thistle Lake covering over structures - 25 Aug 1983
2	30-34	83-175, new highway construction - 25 Aug 1983
2	35-37	83-177, drain tunnel and Thistle highway construction - 6 Sep 1983
2	38	83-201, Thistle, rains and flash flooding of highway and dam - 9 Sep 1983
2	39-42	83-203, Thistle construction project documentation - 20 Sep 1983
2	43-45	83-207, second drill hole on dam, final blast before draining - 28 Sep 1983
2	46-47	83-208, drain control gates in drain tunnel - 29 Sep 1983
2	48	83-209, Autumn shots on Stewart Road - 30 Sep 1983
2	49-52	83-210, opening drain control gates - 1 Oct 1983
2	53-54	83-212, Thistle project, Stewart Road, big cut - 5 Oct 1983

Box	Folder	Description
2	55-56	83-217, aerals of Thistle Lake - 3 Oct 1983
2	57-58	83-219, Thistle project, blasting drain hole - 19 Oct 1983
2	59	83-233, Thistle Lake from Stewart Road - 5 Nov 1983
2	60-63	83-234, Thistle (50 ft. left in big cut) - 9 Nov 1983
2	64-68	83-235, Thistle highway construction thru Billies Mountain - 10 Nov 1983
2	69-70	83-236, Thistle asphalt lay-down east of Billies Mountain - 11 Nov 1983
2	71	83-237, Thistle U.S. 89 south of Thistle and big cut - 12 Nov 1983
2	72-76	83-238, aerals big slide in big cut - 15 Nov 1983
3	1-6	83-239, Thistle ground shots - 16 Nov 1983
3	7	83-240, Thistle ground shots - 17 Nov 1983
3	8-9	83-247, asphalt lay-down west of Billies Mountain - 23 Nov 1983
3	10	83-248, snows, big cut at night - 27 Nov 1983
3	11-19	83-249, blasting on U.S. 89 side of Billies Mountain - 29 Nov 1983
3	20-23	83-250, Thistle drain tunnel shaft & shelf, snow on Billies - 30 Nov 1983
3	24	83-251 Thistle construction - 3 Dec 1983
3	25-27	83-252, Thistle aerals - 5 Dec 1983
3	28	83-255, morning shots on south side of big cut in Billies - 6 Dec 1983
3	29-30	83-256, Thistle and U.S. 89 - 10 Dec 1983
3	31-38	83-257, Thistle, 2 new slides East of Billies and big cut - 13 Dec 1983
3	39-45	83-263, Thistle, slide on north side of Billies - 16 Dec 1983
3	46-47	83-266, Thistle, last minute preparations opening new U.S.6 - 30 Dec 1983
3	48-59	83-267, official opening of U.S. 6 through Billies Mountain - 31 Dec 1983
3	60-64	84-001, Thistle, shots of drained lake from top of dam - 12 Jan 1984
3	65-68	84-004 Thistle, preparing to blow the controls - 18 Jan 1984
3	69	84-005, Thistle, Bullies cut - 19 Jan 1984
3	70	84-012, Thistle, drain tunnel without control - 22 Jan 1984
3	71	84-073, Thistle, temporary opening of U.S.89 in flood plain - 26 May 1984